

VZCZCXRO2116  
RR RUEHPA  
DE RUEHOS #0310/01 2020650  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 210650Z JUL 09  
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0891  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA 0479  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUCPDOG/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE  
RUZEJAA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000310

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/17/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [KCRM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: INCREASED VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH EAST -  
MILITANT OR CRIMINAL?

REF: A. LAGOS 098

[B](#). ABUJA 1025

[C](#). LAGOS 282

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL DONNA BLAIR FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Recent cases of kidnappings, hijackings and armed robberies in the South East have been increasingly attributed to "militants" or other criminal elements coming in from the South South or Delta region blaming it on the military putting pressure on them in that area. Roadways between cities and states are congested with police and military roadblocks allegedly to prevent influx of militants from the Niger Delta. Three South East governors (Imo, Abia, Ebonyi) have told the Ambassador in recent weeks that the problem of kidnapping and uptick in crime in their states are due to spillover of violence from the Delta. However, the tactics used in kidnappings and violent robberies seem to indicate that these are smaller-scale, financially motivated crimes rather than an spillover of Niger Delta "militancy". End Summary.

Increase in Violent Crime, No Confidence in State Security  
-----

[2](#). (SBU) In recent visits to the South East and during Mission meetings with contacts, personal accounts of kidnappings, hijackings, and armed robberies dominate conversation. During a June 16-18 visit, the Ambassador noticed a dramatically increased number of roadblocks every 150 meters where individuals and vehicles were thoroughly inspected, presumably for weapons or contraband. The roadblocks and barricades were placed on all major highways, and often at half-mile intervals. While most of the barricades were staffed by the National Police Force (NPF), some had military personnel stopping and inspecting vehicles. The roadblocks, however, are only indicative of the much larger security problem in the South East.

[3](#). (SBU) Every day, the media reports on the increasing violence in the South East region. In June, violent robberies of three banks in Anambra left eight dead and sixteen persons injured. In Abia, labor unions and professional organizations threaten to strike over the deteriorating security environment and increasing crime. The Nigerian Bar Association in these states claims that eleven of its members have been victims of violent robbery and kidnapping in the past few months. Commercial banks are forced to transport cash via helicopter because of the frequent assault of bank vehicles on the roads (Reftel A). Luxury vehicles are often the targets of carjacking on urban

and rural roads. In Abia, Imo, and Anambra, prominent politicians' and businessmen's family members have frequently been kidnapped for ransom, including the children of the Imo State Speaker of the House of Assembly. Senator Enyinnaya Abaribe (PDP, Abia South) reported to the media that in June, he barely escaped kidnapping in the center of Aba, the main commercial hub of the South East. During a shootout with the kidnappers, Senator Abaribe's accompanying mobile patrol police was killed. After the kidnappers fled the scene, a professor from a local university was found in the trunk of their car. On June 3, 153 prisoners broke out of the Enugu prison. The Comptroller-General of Prisons claimed that 130 of these inmates had been recaptured by police and security forces, but 20 still remained at large.

14. (C) During a June 17 meeting, Governor Elechi of Ebonyi State told the Ambassador that his government intervened to secure the release of an Italian contractor kidnapped in April. On June 29, an American citizen was ambushed on a roadway outside of Owerri, the capital of Imo State, and his driver and accompanying police officer were killed (Reftel C). He believes he was then transported to Rivers and then Imo State, where he was held for some days before his company was able to secure his release. A Nigerian/Canadian dual national was kidnapped by the same group and held with the Amcit before his family paid a ransom and he was released.

Militants or Just Plain Criminals?  
-----

15. (C) The governors of South Eastern states have claimed

LAGOS 00000310 002 OF 002

that the increased violence is due to more criminal elements coming from the Niger Delta moving into the South East. On May 22, Governor Ohakim of Imo State told the Ambassador that "militant" or criminal elements are fleeing into Imo from the Niger Delta (Reftel B). Also on May 22, Governor Orji of Abia state told the Ambassador that his state had "inherited" the kidnapping industry from the Delta region. During his meeting with the Ambassador on June 17, Governor Elechi of Ebonyi state said that since 2007, South East states have established a stronger police presence to monitor local highways of the region, particularly those that could be used as transit points for criminals and weapons coming to and from the Niger Delta. He said that since the recent upsurge in Joint Task Force (JTF) activity in May, the police and military checkpoints on roadways have increased. All of the governors have acknowledged that that security has deteriorated over the past year and have attributed it to "militant" activity and criminals coming into their states from the Niger Delta and are demanding more funding and assistance from the Federal Government.

16. (C) Nonetheless, the methods used during attacks and the modus operandi of negotiating ransom indicate that these kidnappers are far less sophisticated than their South South criminal counterparts. During a recent kidnapping of the father of a wealthy Imo state businessman, the kidnappers initially demanded 70 million naira (\$470,000). After twelve days of negotiation, he was released after providing the kidnappers with only 6,000 naira (\$40) worth of pre-paid cell phone recharge cards. Kidnappers have been reported to pose as mobile telecom company representatives, priests, and often, as police or other security operatives. A level of professionalism is often lacking, as kidnappers sometimes drive their victim to various family members' homes asking them to give money towards their own ransom. Most contacts laugh at the idea that MEND or some other "militant" group would ever use such amateur tactics.

17. (C) Ebele Chuka, an attorney and human rights activist in Anambra state, told Polspec on July 13 that there is a stark difference between the hostage-taking in the South East and that of the South South. While the Niger Delta kidnappings emerged as a battle for resources, it has now developed into

full-blown criminality that still claims to have some cause. The violence and kidnappings of the South East, Chuka said, is pure criminality that has nothing to do with resource control or any defined regional demand. He believes that kidnappers in Abia and Imo states are unemployed youth who want to make a living from kidnapping. In Anambra state, he believes that businessmen and professionals have formed kidnapping syndicates to influence politicians and earn supplemental income. Chuka stated that the only possible link between the criminals of the South South and those of the South East is the procurement of arms and ammunition. With the money earned from ransom payments, the South East criminals are increasingly able to finance more sophisticated criminal activity.

18. (C) Comment: At a time when the states of the South East are seeking investment and development, the security problems are increasingly scaring away investors and businesses. Although the governors shift blame to both the militants and criminal elements to get Federal Government attention, there is no indication that true "militants" from the Niger Delta have any reason to go into small-scale robberies and kidnapping for ransom. There have not been any cases where a link to Delta-based criminal groups can be proven; instead, most cases of kidnapping that have been investigated have been traced right back to other South East businessmen, politicians, and local criminals. The violence can be attributed to local residents, but the governors consider it easier to attribute it to outsiders than to take responsibility and provide the resources to enhance security and law enforcement. One thing these homegrown criminals may have learned from their Niger Delta brethren; in Nigeria crime often does pay. End Comment.

19. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Abuja.  
BLAIR